



Good afternoon Harrison Families:

The purpose of my communication is to follow up on the email and survey that were released on Tuesday, July 28, 2020 as well as the public Board of Education meeting that occurred on Monday July 27, 2020 that over 270 community members and staff participated in. Since I last communicated, I have received a number of similar questions and feedback from all stakeholders as we all prepare to make the best decision possible for our families and children. I thought it would be most effective to address some of those questions and concerns to our full community in an effort to clarify some points of our current schedule for September. Please note that Harrison's Restart Plan, in its entirety, will be subject to the Department of Education's "compliance review". Also, as of the public BOE meeting held on Monday, July 27, 2020, only the hybrid and virtual schedule and academic delivery plan were BOE approved. The full Restart Plan that specifically addresses such topics as social distancing practices, cleaning schedules and masks has not yet been BOE approved. Given the Governor's updated directive of a mandatory virtual option that he released on Friday July 24, 2020, just two days before our Board meeting and nearly a month after his initial release of the guidelines for reopening, the Restart Plan in its entirety was not prepared for BOE review and action. Also, we are hopeful for further direction, specifically on what will be required in the plan to pass the Department of Ed's "compliance review". Once the overall plan is BOE approved and has passed the NJ Department of Education's "compliance review", it will be posted on the district's website.

1. SURVEY CLARIFICATION: The survey you have been asked to complete that is due on Monday, August 3, 2020 has been developed for **PLANNING** purposes. Specifically, it is important for administration to get an idea of how many families per grade level are seriously considering or have already decided on the virtual model of instruction for September. This number will be imperative in the development of schedules, class lists and staffing assignments. These survey results are certainly not considered an official commitment from any family. The administration is developing the request document for virtual learning that will need to be completed and submitted by any family choosing virtual instruction for their child(ren) **NO LATER THAN AUGUST 15, 2020. Completion of this document will be the ONLY INDICATION of your final decision.** If you have hesitated to complete the initial survey because you were under the impression that this would be the district's notification of your final decision, I hope that you will now feel comfortable in completing it with your best prediction of what choice your family will make.

2. TRANSFER REQUESTS BETWEEN PROGRAMS: For any family choosing the virtual option by August 15, 2020, your child(ren) will be placed in a virtual cohort through December 23, 2020 unless a change is mandated by the State of NJ for all districts. A family may choose to transfer from a virtual cohort to an in person cohort and inform the districts of the desired change **NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 15, 2020 FOR A JANUARY 4, 2021** start. This is the only date, under the current plan, that a family can make a change for their child(ren) from virtual to hybrid. Also, please note that if you choose to transfer your child out of the virtual model starting on January 4, 2021, your child will most likely be assigned a new, in person teacher.

3. CLEANING PROCEDURES BETWEEN THE AM AND PM

COHORTS: The administration and staff are working diligently to ensure that materials are not shared at all between students, this will include desks and work spaces. Although in person students will be attending instruction either in the AM or PM in groups of an average of less than 9 students in a full sized classroom, they will be assigned their own desk and materials that will not be touched or used during the half of the day that they are not present. Also, a custodian will be assigned to each wing in both buildings to clean between sessions. Departments such as our general aides who are mainly employed for work in the cafeteria and playgrounds will be reassigned to assist in ensuring that our environment is as safe as possible since, under this emergency plan, they will not be needed in the cafeteria or on the playground. Teachers will also be given an environmentally safe product for use in their classroom as they see necessary. The busses will also be sprayed between runs to help ensure the overall safety of our environment. All guidelines will be closely followed and only cleaning products deemed safe in the school environment but also effective will be used.

4. MASKS: Masks are obviously an important part of our overall Restart Plan being discussed extensively by members of our community and staff on many different platforms including social media. I have also received close to 120 individual emails and phone calls exclusively on this topic over the last week, some of which seem to be based on incomplete or partially inaccurate information gathered from sources outside the district. First, please let me clarify that at no point or on any level am I nor any member of our administration prioritizing anything above the safety of our students or our staff members as we discuss, develop and plan for our mask procedures for our elementary students. The position of the Harrison Township School District on masks will NOT be finalized until the Board of Education reviews and acts on the overall detailed Restart Plan and the Department of Education completes the "compliance review". However, below are some specific clarifications on our developing plans for masks during the in person school day in September:

* Our administration and maintenance staff is currently using the CDC guidelines and the directions handed down by the NJ Department of Education to implement social distancing barriers and procedures that consider safety first but also the practicality and necessity of youngest learners optimizing the precious, limited in person instruction time that we have planned for

* All adults are required to wear masks at all times in the school building. This includes all staff and visitors.

* The current split schedule allows for an average of less than 9 students to be in a full sized classroom during in person instruction. This allows for students to be distanced 6 feet apart in every direction and all facing the same direction.

* Students will enter their classrooms and will not be moving through the building to different classrooms, whenever possible

* The full administrative team has been working closely with our local maintenance experts and the fire department to make informed decisions on safe barriers to be put between student work spaces and around teacher work spaces that meet all required safety codes as well as the guidelines set forth by the state. Recently, we received clearance on the following product to be used as barriers between our kindergarten students as they are instructed at tables rather than individual student desks:

Plastic Poly Sheeting from Boen:

**** made from a durable water-resistant material***

**** efficiently acts as a protective barrier for a multitude of construction, agriculture and demolition projects***

**** heavy-duty material protects and shields nearly anything from moisture, dust, dirt, rain, snow, wind, chemicals and much more***

**** made from a quality material that is water, wrinkle and weather resistant ensuring that it acts as a protective shield and barrier***

**** often used in construction as a barrier for dust during demolition***

**** commonly used for asbestos abatement to enclose and seal areas when removing asbestos***

**** can be used to seal and cover windows for insulation.***

* These precautions and procedures have been carefully thought out to allow for the students to remove their masks for instruction **WHEN SEATED IN THEIR CLASSROOMS**. Obviously, students will certainly be permitted to keep their masks on should they so choose regardless of the final decision of the district.

* For clarity, masks will not be "optional" under any circumstances within the current plan as some community members have communicated their impression to be. In fact, the district is providing washable masks to all students should they so choose to use those issued rather than a mask of their own. The Harrison Township School District will undoubtedly be following the state guidelines which **REQUIRE** a face covering when students are unable to be socially distanced within the school setting. Therefore, there is **NO QUESTION** that masks on all students, short of those with documented medical exemptions, will be **REQUIRED** including but not limited to such times as: riding the busses, entering the school building, leaving the school building, walking through the hallways to get to their classrooms, and **ANY OTHER TIME** when social distancing is not manageable. This is not a choice of the school district but rather a direction under the guidelines that we must follow in order to open school. The **ONLY** question currently is whether or not our elementary population will be permitted to remove their masks **WHEN THEY ARE SEATED IN THEIR CLASSROOM** where desks are socially distanced (6 feet apart in every direction and all students assigned 113 square feet of individual space as per state guidelines) or a physical barrier is hanging between them. This final decision will not be made until the Board of Education has had an opportunity to consider the administration's recommendations and review the barriers and social distancing procedures that we have in place as part of our overall plan and the Department of Education completes their compliance review.

I recognize that this is an emotional time for our entire country as we prepare for September. It is very important for our community to know that our entire staff has been working consistently to plan and re-plan for our students since March as new and updated information, direction and guidelines come to local school districts from the State. We must also prepare for potential changes to this plan as data regarding public health is updated and the Governor's offices provides updated direction on the schools' openings. There is nothing more important to this entire staff than the safety of our students, our teachers and our community as a whole. As a public school district, we are charged with the responsibility of not only keeping the safety of our community in mind, but also planning for an education that is as effective as possible for our young learners in the current circumstance. We carefully and continually review all information that comes to us regarding the overall safety in the educational setting including every individual communication from our parents and stakeholders. We are using all of this information to inform our decisions as we plan to welcome our children back in September.

I hope this communication provide some further clarity as you continue to make decisions for your families. Thank you and enjoy the remainder of your weekend.

***Dr. Missy Quinn Peretti, Superintendent of Schools
Harrison Township School District
120 North Main Street
Mullica Hill, NJ 08062
(856) 478-2016 X 7123***